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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses two early childhood education courses offered in the Department of Educational Curriculum and Instruction at Bowling Green State University. Early Childhood Competency I (ECC I) is a course offering sophomores and juniors the opportunity to work on a one-to-one basis with a youngster under the age of three years in the child's own home. Students are required to prepare lesson plans, create at least two games or other instructional aids for "their child," share ideas with the parent(s), check out appropriate materials from the Curriculum Resource Library, complete a handbook and have a midterm and a final conference with the instructor. Early Childhood Competency II (ECC II) provides students with the opportunity of working in a day care center or nursery school. Students spend four hours a week in the center for a minimum of 30 contact hours preparing lesson plans, working with small and large groups of children and individuals. (Author/RH)

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Come--Walk With Me

By Dr. Elizabeth Stimson

Presentation at NAEYC, Atlanta, Georgia
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"Come--Walk With Me" is your invitation for an informal walk through one of the most worthwhile and challenging courses Early Childhood students have at Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, Ohio. The official titles for these two courses offered by the Department of Educational Curriculum and Instruction are Early Childhood Competency I and II. These are not very exciting titles. It's what the students are engaged in that makes these courses so valuable.

Early Childhood Competency I offers sophomores and juniors the opportunity to work on a one-to-one basis with a youngster under the age of three years in the child's own home. Each student spends four hours per week in the home and completes a minimum of 30 contact hours during the quarter. This is not like the old baby sitting jobs students may have had because they must prepare lesson plans, create at least two games or other instructional aids for "their child," share ideas with the parent(s), check out appropriate materials from the Curriculum Resource Library, complete a Handbook and have a midterm and final conference with the instructor, which happens to be me. No, it definitely is not baby sitting and even if the child is only six months old, the requirements are the same. However, with the younger children I suggest that students schedule two shorter periods of two hours each week instead of one four-hour block.

During 1979 the suggested text was The First Three Years of Life by Burton White. In 1980 it will be Learning Games for the First

Three Years by Joseph Sparling and Isabelle Lewis. I am making the change because the students need a great deal of help in selecting age-appropriate games and activities. Many early childhood education undergraduates experience difficulty trying to teach young children since they cannot use a pencil and paper. The students seem to have trouble equating teaching and learning to a non-academic setting using non-academic tools.

Early Childhood Competency II provides students with the opportunity of working in a day care center or nursery school in Bowling Green, Maumee, Toledo, Sylvania or on the BGSU campus. Again, students spend four hours a week in the center for a minimum of 30 contact hours preparing lesson plans, working with small and large groups of children and individuals. Some of the children are three or four years old, others may be five and attending kindergarten half the day. The center directors have the option of placing the students where they are most needed as long as they will be allowed to plan and carry out two full four-hour sessions before the end of the quarter.

Whereas I am primarily responsible for the student's grade in ECC I, the day care or nursery teacher and director are mainly responsible for the student's grade in ECC II. In the home based section, I confer with the parent, use the lesson plans which the student puts into the Handbook, the student's comments, evaluations and checklist as well as my observations for their grades. I also take into account their participation in the one-hour long weekly seminars. For the ECC II groups, I also use my evaluations of their performance and confer with the teacher and/or director. Of major importance in both courses is the rapport established between the student and the child

or children with whom she is working. Some students who seem to get along well with only one child have difficulty with the facilitator's role in the center.

Now, come and walk with me through part of Early Childhood Competency I. Pretend you are a sophomore or junior again and you are attending the first seminar for ECC I. You really don't know what to expect but you are about to find out.

During our first hour together I ask each young woman (I've not had any men yet) to introduce herself. "What makes you interested in the field of early childhood?" I may ask. I give each student a copy of the Handbook which consists of a brief explanation of the grading system, the use of midterm and final conferences in place of exams, the checklists for them to use to evaluate the learning environments and what they are doing, and a great number of blank pages on which to write their lesson plans and self-evaluations. Then we come to the exciting part--selecting a child with whom to work.

"I'm going to pass around index cards containing the names of the children available this quarter," I tell the students. "Look at the ages and where the child lives. If you are without transportation, consider distance and whether or not the parents provide a ride." I ask that students with cars consider the children who live too far from campus for walking.

Students need about fifteen or twenty minutes to select a child. They note the information and make plans to phone the parents for an initial interview. This is to be accomplished prior to our next seminar. I tell them to ask some questions about the child they've chosen: interests, personality, any siblings, and their ages. I tell

the students to borrow something from the Curriculum Resource Library for their first meeting and not to be surprised if their chosen child does not make up with them at once. Students are to set up schedules and let me know, in writing, the following week. If a student or parent decides, after the initial interview, that this arrangement is not going to work out, they let me know and we begin over again.

Usually, at this point and for the next two or three weeks, the students are rather confused. They don't know what to take with them to appeal to this unknown child, and they can't imagine writing a lesson plan for a toddler. I tell them that I realize their position and I know that it will be resolved. It just takes a little time. Instead of writing a lesson plan for the first week, I have them put down three, four or more ideas plus the materials they take with them. They also evaluate what actually occurred after their visit. This gets them started.

Seminar topics vary but I usually schedule a presentation by the Curriculum Resource Center librarian for the second meeting. After that we cover lesson plans. With only one hour available each week, it is difficult to go into much depth. At each seminar, I ask the students to share a highlight of their week. Each girl gives the name and age of the child she is working with and then shares a special moment. At least once each quarter we've thrilled to the event of the first steps taken alone by one of the children. I also ask for any problems the students might be encountering. This encourages communication among the students as they offer suggestions to one another.

Other seminar topics include parent communication, which is something I stress, child development from birth to three years,

nutrition and its importance to health, and outdoor activities. Sometimes students suggest topics when they meet a need for which they have no answer.

To review child development I group the class by threes or fours and give each group a game board and a stack of cards. The games are drawn on bright green, yellow or orange poster board and consist of a winding path divided into blocks. Some of the blocks have messages such as: "You had toast, eggs, orange juice, and milk for breakfast today. Advance two spaces," "You read a story to a neighbor's pre-schooler. Advance one space," or "You stayed up too late watching TV and were cross today. Miss one turn." The boards are decorated with magic marker sketches or brightly colored and appropriate stickers which can be purchased in stationery stores.

Sometimes I use slides of former students working with young children if they are needed to illustrate a particular point. I also loan books, articles, and games or game ideas to students.

After the fourth week the students begin to relax and enjoy working with their young child. It is exciting and rewarding to see the students change and begin to act with confidence.

Although I've not had many twins in the program there have been some. There has been a set of triplets also. With the triplets, I assigned two students because one girl along would have been overwhelmed. The triplets had two sets of students, in fact, and both times the experience was very successful. The first time the children were only 15 months old, the second time they were just under three years.

During the quarter I visit the students in the homes approximately three times to observe them. I check the lesson plans, listen to the student's talk, evaluate the material being used, and, frequently, talk a little bit with the parent. I always confer with the parent before deciding upon the final grade. If there is a conflict, for instance, the parent says that the student has not put in four hours per week and the student says that she has, I schedule a three-way conference and we discuss the issue. If I am not convinced that the student has met the requirement, I ask her to come back and work with the child one or two more times. Only rarely has this been necessary.

Occasionally, I have a student whom I think will not do well in this class and I am surprised by the parent's comments. "The student is always prepared, works well with the child," the parent may say. She is liked by the child and, apparently, is very successful. It is absolutely imperative that I see the student working with the child in the child's home. I cannot tell from the student's behavior in class whether or not she will be successful in the home.

Before the end of the quarter I try to arrange for the students to visit one or two child centers in the area. This helps them when they must select a center for Early Childhood Competency II.

The most difficult yet most pleasurable part of these courses is scheduling the visits to homes and centers. It takes tons of time--a commodity in short supply around our department. It takes time and gasoline to drive from location to location. It takes time to talk with a young child, to compare ideas with the student, to visit with the parent. And, in spite of the time pressure, this is the fun part of the course because I can play and talk with the children.

About half way through the quarter, the students really relax and enjoy themselves. Lesson plans improve, snapshots of "their child" appear, humorous stories are told, and a lot of learning occurs. It is a rewarding experience for child, parents, student and me. You can't ask for anything more than that.

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